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Department of State

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FOR THE SECRETARY AND THE PRESIDENT FROM AMBASSADOR HABIB

7. THE SPEED OF THE ISRAELI ADVANCE TODAY HAS OUTRUN OUR ABILITY TO ANALYZE ITS IMPLICATIONS, BUT I AM FILLED WITH FOREBODING ABOUT THE LIKELIHHOD OF A MAJOR SYRIAN-ISRAELI ESCALATION IF BEGIN'S MESSAGE IS REJECTED BY ASSAD. WE ARE ALSO INCREASINGLY WORRIED THAT RECENT ISRAELI MILITARY SUCCESSES MAY HAVE NOW PERSUADED BOTH BEGIN AND BASHIR GEMAYEL THAT SHARON'S MORE AMBITIOUS SCHEME IS WORTH GOING FOR. IF THIS ESCALATION OF OBJECTIVES IS NOW GOING ON, I DO NOT BELIEVE THE SYRIANS CAN IN ANY WAY ACCEPT THE RESULT - WHICH WOULD MEAN THE VIRTUAL LOSS OF THEIR DOMINANT POSITION IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS. I BELIEVE THEY MIGHT JUST MAKE A MAJOR FIGHT NOW RATHER THAN SWALLOW THIS HUMILIATION, EVEN AT THE COST OF A MILITARY DEFEAT.

8. WE ARE VERY NEAR THEREFORE TO HAVING TO DECIDE WHETHER TO PRESS HARDER FOR ISRAELI AGREEMENT TO AN IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE IN WHICH THEIR FORCES STAY WITHIN THE GENERAL RANGE OF THE 40 KILOMETER BUFFER ZONE THAT BEGIN HAS

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DECLARED AS HIS OBJECTIVE RATHER THAN THE EXTREME ADVANCES IN THE AREA OF BEIRUT THAT MAY NOW BE INDICATED. IF I AM TO MAKE THIS FIRM STATEMENT TO BEGIN TOMORROW I WILL NEED TO BACK IT UP WITH STRONG EVIDENCE OF PRESIDENTIAL DETERMINATION. IN THIS RESPECT WE SHOULD ALSO BE ABLE TO USE THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL FOR ADDED PERSUASION.

9. FOR BEIRUT: YOU SHOULD SCRUPULOUSLY RESPECT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S REQUEST RE CONFIDENTIALITY REGARDING CONTACTS WITH BASHIR. DO NOT DISCUSS IT WITH ANYONE, INCLUDING BASHIR AND SARKIS, BUT REPORT URGENTLY ANYTHING YOU PICK UP INDEPENDENTLY THAT RELATES TO THIS SUBJECT. GROVE

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